

William Boys
Observations on Kits Coity House, in Kent
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IV. Observations on Kits Coity House, in Kent. In a Letter to Samuel Foart Simmons, M. D. F. R. and A. SS. By William Boys, Esq. F. A. S.

Read Feb. 9, 1792.

Dear Sir,

In travelling some time ago from this place to London, I turned a few miles out of my way to see Kits Coity House. If you should think the observations I made upon the spot, and the thoughts that have occurred to me since, may be acceptable, I beg leave, by your means, to communicate them to our Society.

Mr. Colebrook [a] and Mr. Grose [b] have so fully and accurately described this antient monument, that very little can be added to what they have said of it. One thing, however, struck me, when I saw the place, that seems to have escaped the notice of all who have mentioned the subject. The ground between the monument and the single stone spoken of by those gentlemen, and represented in their plates, runs east and west, in a broad ridge, somewhat contracted at each end, giving one an idea of a common turfed grave, with a head and foot-stone, on a large scale. Was this a tumulus, covering the remains of those of one party, who fell in the

[a] Archæologia, vol. II. p. 107.

[b] Antiquities of England, &c. vol. II.

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battle? And might there not have been, originally, a similar appendage to the other stone monument, now worn down in the enclosure of cultivation, covering the remains of the other party? These turfed graves might contain the bodies both of the chiefs and their followers; while the stone erections themselves might be raised to commemorate the two princes; a sepulchral honour, perhaps appropriated at that time to dignified characters only. I am aware, that much larger tumuli have been raised over single bodies; but I apprehend, if only one corpse had been placed in this repository, the mound would have been circular, and the stones would have been at the top in the centre.

The history of events at the first arrival of the Saxons in Britain is obscure and contradictory. But the following circumstances seem to have been generally admitted, and are selected as necessary to elucidate what may be said of these monuments. The Britons under Vortigern, in the middle of the fifth century, invited over the Saxons, to defend them from the attacks of the Picts and Scots. These hardy soldiers of fortune readily accepted the invitation, and landed, under Hengist and Horsa, at Ebbesfleet, in Thanet, on the North side of the eastern mouth of the Portus Rutupinus. That island was immediately put into their hands [c], and became their head quarters; but these warriors soon found means to enlarge their boundary, and by treaty or conquest became possessed of all Kent. The Britons now found themselves in as much danger from their auxiliaries as from their enemies;

and, roused to action by the perfidy of Vortigern, and the encroachments of the Saxons, they deposed their king, and raised his son Vortimer to the throne. This young monarch

[c] Nennii Hist. Brit. c. xxviii.

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fought several battles with the Saxons, and, in particular, one at Aeillstreu [d], Ægelesthrip [e], Æglisthrop [f], Epiford [g], as the name is variously written, and which our best antiquaries suppose to be Ailesford, near Maidstone, in Kent. In this battle fell Horsus [g], Horsa [g], or Hors [g], the brother of Hengist, and Catigirinus [g], Categirn [g], or Categis [h], the brother of Vortimer.

When the two Saxon brothers and joint commanders acquired the government of Kent, it is probable they made a division of the whole into two parts. Hengist, the elder brother, we will suppose, took the Western division, and fixed himself on the banks of the Thames, in the post of honour nearest his enemies, leaving the coast and the eastern district to the care and superintendance of Horsa; who, most likely, seated himself somewhere on the banks of the Medway. Horsted, therefore, may possibly derive its name from Horsa: but why in commemoration of his death? Stede, in Saxon, signifying place, applies at least as well to his residence as to his sepulchre. The heap of flints at Horsted, mentioned by Mr. Colebrook, is properly disposed of by that gentleman [i]; and the large stones noticed there by Mr. Hasted do not seem to have had any particular designation. We must therefore search at some other spot for Horsa's monument; and to what more probable spot can we turn our attention than to the fields of battle at Ailesford? Here we find two remarkable structures of stone, the one in good preservation, the other at

[d] Saxon Chronicle.

[e] Asser, Annal.

[f] Marc.

[g] Nennius

[h] William of Malmesbury.

[i] Archæologia, vol. II. p. 110.

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a little distance on lower ground to the Southward, in ruins. The first consists of four stones only; the other of nine at least; one of which is nearly twelve feet long, and twenty-one inches thick.

If we believe that Horsa and Catigern were slain in a battle fought at Ailesford; that the contest was about the place where Kits Coity House stands; and that structures of stone were set up to commemorate the fall of these princes; we may then, I think, conclude very reasonably, that these are the memorials of Horsa and Catigern. But the matter, if I mistake not, may be reduced to a tolerable degree of certainty by a proper attention to the name at present appropriated to one of these erections, which, perhaps, originally was given to neither of them, but to the tracts of land on which they stand; in other words, to the field of battle. Kits Coity House, as now written, and generally interpreted, seems to have no meaning. If the ground there has been a sheep-walk, why should this place of shelter have been appropriated in its appellation to one shepherd more than to another, when all of them must in succession have made the same use of it? Mr. Grose's etymology is more plausible; and I say nothing against it: but I will venture to propose another, which seems to

apply better to all the circumstances of the case. The word, I should suppose, is Saxon, and was written at first Cid-categ-hors. The place of contention between Cautey (for so it might have been pronounced) and Hors: and Kid Cautey Hors, by the common people, who are apt to assimilate unknown sounds to familiar ones, even of no meaning, has been corrupted to Kits Coity House.

Before I conclude, I would add a few words on the *campus et lapis tituli super ripam Gallici maris*, where Nennius [k] and

[k] Hist. Brit. c. xlvi.

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others [l] say the Saxons were routed with slaughter, and driven to their vessels and islands for safety, by Vortimer, and where that prince is said to have directed his body to be buried, *ad compescendos Saxonum furores*.

Mr. Somner [m] contends that Folkestone, and Mr. Battely [n] that Stone by Lydd, must be the place here meant, though it appears clearly, that neither of them would have objected to Stonar, if they had not been convinced in their own minds that Stonar was at that time a part of Thanet. But they were both most certainly mistaken; as Stonar was then either buried altogether in the æstuary, or, which is more probable, just emerging from its bed, and forming the South-east point of its mouth in a long range of beach-stones; whence it acquired its name of Estanore, Stanore, *ora lapidea orientalis*. And here surely a *lapis tituli* was as likely to be set up as on Dengeness; and it might have been fixed here at the first coming of the Saxons, to shew the extent of the territory conceded to them by the Britons. The *campus juxta lapidem* might be the higher ground on which Sandwich now stands, and its neighbourhood; and the expression *super ripam Gallici maris* is certainly as applicable to any part of the land between the two forelands as to the coast near Lydd or Folkestone.

Vortimer had pursued the Saxons from the interior parts of Kent; and, pressing close on their rear, came to blows with them, probably in the act of embarkation, and before they could reach their larger vessels of transport. A fugitive army, reduced to the necessity of a disorderly embarkation, must be

[l] Galf. Mon. vi. 13.

[m] Roman Ports, &c. p. 94. 98.

[n] Antiq. Rutup. p19.

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much at the mercy of the pursuers, and lose many men: and the great slaughter made at this place might suggest the thought to Vortimer, if the anecdote be true, of having his body buried here, as a memento of the British prowess; which a conspicuous object raised over his remains would ever after, as soon as seen, recal very forcibly to the memory of the Saxons. A church, for instance, at Stonar, would perpetually present itself to the view of the Saxons in their island, and of those who should approach the port from abroad [o].

The *Portus Rutupinus*, without a doubt, was the harbour to which the Saxons, after their first establishment in Thanet, always resorted. It was, in fact, their own port, while they occupied that island; and it was probably at that time, as well as afterwards [p], the most famous port of Britain. In coming from the Elbe to the South-east part of England, they constantly made the North Foreland; and as soon as they had

passed that headland, this port presented itself to their view. Would they, in their senses, pass by it, increasing the length and hazard of the voyage, to seek a harbour of less commodious access at Folkestone or Lydd?

Might the word *campus* have relation to the Roman station at Richborough, known perhaps to the Saxons and Britons of that time by the name of the camp? It was certainly used in that sense by some of the writers of the lower age. The place was just such an elevated and insulated spot as the Saxons would wish to occupy, when pressed by an enemy, and necessitated to take shipping. The foot of the hill was washed

[o] Vortimer, however, seems not to have been buried as he directed; for Nennius buries him at Lincoln, and Geoffry of Monmouth, at Troinivant, or London.

[p] *Emmæ reginæ Encom.*

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by the sea, and they could step from the bank into their boats. The post was a strong one; but the Britons, we may suppose, stormed and carried it. The stony bank, at Stonar, lay in its front, and the *lapis tituli*, if erected there, could not be more than 260 rods distant.

Or, might not the *lapis tituli* have been placed on this very hill within the walls of the castle, where I have actually discovered the foundation of a solid stone-building, raised upon the platform of the *prætorium*, that might well have served for a *lapis tituli*? In this case, the words, *campus juxta lapidem tituli* might be descriptive of the extensive ground without the walls of the castle near the boundary-stone within its area.

Where the evidence is so deficient, it would be ridiculous to form a decisive opinion. I state the different conjectures that have arisen in my mind in considering the subject, and shall be contented, if any of them shall be thought to be founded in probability.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your faithful servant,

W. BOYS.

Sandwich, 29th Jan. 1792.

<C.F. August 2014.>